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**Droughtmonger**  
Gian Lombardo

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## Gian Lombardo

### DROUGHTMONGER

The young man's grandfather sat on the bench in front of the store. He must be the grandfather. He sounds old enough— his chest rattles with each exhalation. He sits with a stick in one hand. A knife's in the other. Every once in a while he slaps its blade against the stick. That gets my interest. I think it will happen then, finally, he'll begin to carve. May there be a bird spirit so the stick is grabbed by the tail feathers and may a finger catch itself under the curve of the beak.

But I don't want to look too closely. I don't want to jinx him. Towards midday the young man comes out of the store. He taps the grandfather on the shoulder. He takes the stick out of his hand and lays it on the bench. The old man starts to look up at him, but decides otherwise and looks down at the knife which the young man is now placing in its sheath. He lays it on the bench's armrest.

This young man wears a checked shirt and sets a plate of beans in the grandfather's lap.

He sits with a fork in one hand. In the other is a hunk of dark bread. He dunks the bread into the beans every once in a while and takes a bite. What gets my interest is the fork in the other hand. He uses it to swat flies away from his food. It looks like he's beating something down, or off, like something was going to jump off the plate. May there be a coyote leaping out of the plate at his neck, that takes his throat in its mouth. May the old man's fork slice into the animal's back, jam into its belly. May the plate fall to the ground. May twin paths of blood mix on the bench's pine slats.

I don't know if the grandfather remembers the sheathed knife sitting next to him. I don't look too closely. I don't want to jinx him.